



FUTURE AND CHALLENGES OF GOALPARIA DIALECT

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ABSTRACT

The main language of Assam, a state geographically situated in the North-Eastern Region of India, is Assamese. Among the various Dialects of Assamese language, “Goalparia” is regarded as one of the most important dialects. Goalparia dialect is spoken mainly in the lower Brahmaputra valley and the plains of Garo Hills. Historically, as this region was constantly in interaction with the Mughal occupied political Bengal, there are many Bengali and Urdu-Persian words which became part of Goalparia vocabulary. Similarly during the colonial period many English, Hindi words made inroads into Goalparia dialect for various reasons. During the post independence era also, thousands of English, Hindi and Bengali words became part of Goalparia’s vocabulary. So much so that, the speakers of this dialect now a days can not communicate without mixing English, Hindi and Bengali words. Due to this invasion of English, Hindi and Bengali words, Goalparia dialect is slowly losing its inherent charm. Specifically a section of the electronic media is leading this neo-trend of mixing English and Hindi words with local dialect. Moreover, due to easy accessibility of English, Hindi and Bengali TV channels, young children are watching cartoons, films, drama, songs etc regularly and picking words of those languages. Interestingly, there are many educated persons who consider that using English, Hindi, Bengali words, while speaking in Goalparia dialect, is a sign of sophistication. On the other hand, many urban educated persons are ashamed of speaking Goalparia dialect, which is their mother tongue. They think dialects are symbol of backwardness and only illiterate, uncultured rural folks speak dialects. This notion of social stratification based on illogical individual pride and idea of sophistication, is the main reason for which Goalparia dialect is being ignored by many of its original speakers. In a nutshell, Code Switching and Code Mixing are two main reasons responsible for the havoc Goalparia dialect is facing today. Our research paper will try to explore and explain, based on field studies, the various reasons for which Goalparia dialect is in danger today.

KEYWORDS: Goalparia Dialect, Deshi, Electronic Media, Code Switching, Code Mixing, Naming

INTRODUCTION

The Goalparia dialect is a language rich in heritage. The blending of various local sub-dialects has made the Goalparia dialect even more enriched. When we refer to the Goalparia dialect, it generally denotes the language spoken in the undivided Goalpara district, although this dialect is also prevalent in North Bengal and Meghalaya. The local people or natives prefer to call this language “Deshi Bhasha” or “Deshi Katha.” Therefore, the term “Goalparia dialect” seems to be a name given by modern linguists. The Goalparia dialect is filled with examples of pre-Vaishnavite, Vaishnavite, and non-Vaishnavite literature. “To understand the true meaning of ancient Assamese literature, knowledge of the Goalparia language is indispensable.”¹

“The process of settlement has also contributed to the differentiation between the language forms of Upper and Lower Assam. There were no Ahom people in Lower Assam. On the other hand, the direct impact of the seventeen invasions by the Mughals in Assam was felt in Lower Assam. Political, geographical, and cultural factors played a major role in the creation of the Goalparia dialect. The direct rule of the Koch dynasty, the lack of communication with the eastern part of Assam, the predominance of the Bodo population, and the influence of the Bengali language from the west, among other reasons, have shaped the unique form of the Goalparia dialect.”²

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data Sources: The paper utilizes two primary categories of data: primary and secondary sources.

1. Primary Sources:

- **Field Studies:** Data collection primarily stems from field studies conducted in the undivided Goalpara district. This method emphasizes the importance of authentic, first-hand data gathered directly from the area.
- **Observation Method:** This involves the direct observation of language use and cultural practices in the field. Researchers likely recorded these observations to analyze the relationship between dialects, folk languages, and the use of resources.
- **Interview Method:** Interviews were another key technique for gathering primary data. Researchers engaged with local individuals to gain insights into their language use and the psychological factors influencing it.

2. Secondary Sources:

Secondary sources provide additional context and background to support the primary data. A variety of books, magazines, and online resources also contribute as secondary sources. They offer comparative data, scholarly perspectives, and historical information that support the paper’s objectives.

Aims & Objectives: This research paper concentrates on three key areas:

1. To examine the relationship between a language and its dialects, and to examine the characteristics of these dialects.
2. To analyze the primary causes of the challenges faced by the Goalparia dialect.
3. To explore the psychological factors swaying the community's use of the standard language and dialect.

Analysis of the Content:

In a specific linguistic region, when the people living in a particular area use a similar language form, that area is referred to as a dialectal region. When a large number of people from the same linguistic group speak the same language, there can be some phonetic and morphological differences among them. However, these differences are not significant enough to be classified as separate languages. These slight variations in the language are what we refer to as dialects. The scope of a language is vast, while the scope of a dialect is relatively limited. For various reasons, dialects may become separated from the main language, which could be due to natural, political, or cultural factors. A dialect may develop further when the population within the dialectal community increases, when they have access to proper livelihood and education, or if a religious leader emerges within that community and spreads religious teachings. Over time, such a dialect may evolve into a new standard language. If the area of a linguistic community is vast and its members are spread across a large region, the language may take on new forms in different regions due to political, social, and geographical factors. These new forms of the language are what we call dialects.

According to Dr. Ramesh Pathak, "After a language spreads over a large area, due to geographical, political, economic, and cultural reasons, if the interaction between one part of the language community and another decreases, over time, some regional forms of that same language start to emerge. These regional forms are called the dialects of that language."³

The Assamese language has several dialects. Dr. Banikanta Kakati has broadly divided the Assamese language into two major groups: Eastern Assamese and Western Assamese. The Western Assamese language has further been divided into two dialects – Kamrupi and Goalparia dialects.

Dr. Ramesh Pathak has mainly mentioned three forms of Assamese language dialects: "Eastern (Ujoni), Kamrupi, and Goalparia."⁴

From the discussion above, it is clear that the Assamese language primarily has three dialects: Eastern (Ujoni), Kamrupi, and Goalparia. These also have some regional or local variants, such as Sivasagar, Nagaon, Nalbaria, Pati Darrangia, Soigaon, Eastern Goalparia, and Western Goalparia, etc.

To write the complete history of any language or literature, understanding the regional forms of that language is invaluable. Any language carries the cultural expressions and ethnic

behaviours of the people who speak it. The way of life or culture of the people speaking that language is reflected in it. Therefore, just as 'language' is essentially culture, in the same way, culture is essentially language. When transportation facilities improve, regional variations in language decrease. When people from two regions engage in activities like marriages and other social interactions, and there are no significant social barriers, regional differences in language decrease. If people from different regions gather at a religious event, major fair, or religious festival and exchange ideas, the language tends to become more uniform.

According to Grierson, "When we cross the river (Brahmaputra) coming from Dacca, we meet a well-marked form of speech in Rangpur and the districts to its north and east. It is called Rajbangshi, and while undoubtedly belonging to the eastern branch, it still has points of difference that lead us to classify it as a separate dialect."⁵

According to Dr. B. K. Kakati "The spoken dialect of Goalpara district seems to have been contaminated with admixture of the Rajbangshi dialect, the dialect that was evolved under the domination of Koch Bihar whose deondants ruled over Goalpara and contiguous portion of Kamrup."⁶

According to Dr. Upendra Nath Goswami, "There is no special reason to call the Goalparia language 'Rajbangshi.' The language spoken in Gauripur and its surrounding areas represents the western form of the Goalparia dialect. This form is the 'Desi language.' It is not confined to the Rajbangshi community alone; it is spoken by people of all communities. This form has spread to other areas of the Goalpara district and has undergone some changes in different regions. From the west to the east of the undivided Goalpara district, this language has flowed and merged with the Kamrupi dialect."⁷

As we mentioned earlier, the creation of dialects is primarily due to geographical, natural, social, and political factors. The creation of the Goalparia dialect is also primarily due to political, geographical, and cultural reasons. "The direct rule of the Koch kings, the predominance of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic group, the influence of the western Bengali language, and the difficulty in transportation with the eastern part of Assam are the reasons for the creation of the Goalparia dialect."⁸

After being under the Koch kings for a long period, this region came under Mughal rule in 1637. Again, in 1755, this region (the undivided Goalpara district) came under British rule from the Mughals. In 1822, an ordinance issued by the Governor-General of India separated the Goalpara district from Rangpur and formed a new district called 'Northeastern Rangpur District' with Garo Hills. The people of this vast area had close interactions with each other due to the long rule of the Koch kings. Due to difficulties in transportation and other social reasons, the interaction between this region and the eastern parts was limited, which led to the development of a distinct form of language in this region.

Dr. Ramesh Pathak has divided the Goalparia dialect into two

main parts: "Eastern Goalpara and Western Goalpara." The local names of the minor dialectal forms of Eastern Goalpara include Haboraghatiya, Barhajari, and Bausia, etc. The regional forms of Western Goalpara are Gouripuriya and Shalkoshiya.⁹

Dr. Birendra Nath Dutta has divided this Goalpara dialect into two main regional forms. The first form includes the entire region except for the extreme western part of the southern bank and the eastern part of the northern bank of the Brahmaputra in the former Goalpara district. The second form includes the remaining parts of the northern and southern banks of the western region. The first form is called Eastern Goalpara, and the second is called Western Goalpara.¹⁰

It is now observed in the Goalpara dialect that there is an indiscriminate mixing of Hindi and English. Sometimes, this mixing is done intentionally and deliberately. As a result, not only is the sweetness of the Goalpara dialect being lost, but it is also being distorted. The reasons for the on-going deterioration of the Goalpara dialect are several, among which are:

1. Language mixing or code-mixing
2. Code-switching
3. Influence of electronic media
4. Neglectful attitude of the educated and affluent class towards the dialect
5. Consciousness about pronunciation
6. The aggression of the standard language along with other regional languages
7. Lack of creative literature and books written in the dialect
8. Absence of performance and preservation of folk literature
9. Naming or Name confusion

Language mixing, known in linguistics as code-mixing, occurs when words from one language are added to another language. Many in the current generation, often without realizing it, proudly engage in this practice. This trend is largely driven by advertising, TV talk shows, and our FM radio broadcasts, with a few exceptions. Most of these platforms actively promote language mixing.

Due to the influence of Hindi, Bengali, and English channels, the majority of the younger generation has developed the habit of inserting Hindi and English phrases into their conversations. We, the conscious individuals, have also accepted this tendency to "comfortably" contaminate our language without raising concerns. We refrain from commenting on this matter, treating any language other than our dialect as if it holds greater importance. Despite our vocal criticism of Western culture, we remain indifferent to the widespread use of English words in our dialects. In fact, we seem to take pride in using English words in our speech. Below are some examples of language mixing

1. tui leaergiri karbu nã.
2. tui leaergiri dekhãbu nã.
3. ui dailyke but khãy.
4. mui uiyek bus stopageat deikchãng.
5. uiyer bãpta mardery ãsil.
6. policegiri dekhãbi nã.

The speakers of the Goalpara dialect have recently become quite conscious of their pronunciation. As time progresses, the awareness regarding pronunciation among the residents of this region has been increasing. This can be attributed to the rising number of educated people over time. This awareness is particularly evident in the manner of pronunciation and the places where it is spoken.

1. The /dh/ in the standard Assamese language was used as /da/ in the Goalpara dialect. However, now the /dh/ in the standard Assamese language is pronounced as /dh/ in Goalpara as well.

St. As.,	Goalpara Dialect.	Goalpara (Present time).
bãndhu	bãndu	bãndhu
ãdha	ãda / ãdãn	ãdha etc

2. The initial / L / in standard Assamese was historically pronounced as / n / in the Goalpara dialect. However, now the / l / in standard Assamese is pronounced as / l / in Goalpara as well.

St. As.,	Goalpara Dialect.	Goalpara (Present time).
lãu	nãu	lãu
natã	natã	latã

3. Initial / r / at the beginning of Standard Assamese words was not pronounced in the Goalpara dialect; only the following vowel was pronounced. However, nowadays, the initial / r / in Standard Assamese is pronounced as / r / in Goalpara as well.

St. As.,	Goalpara Dialect.	Goalpara (Present time).
rãm	ãm	rãm
rang	ang	rang
rakta	akta	rakta

4. d) The standard Assamese / th / sound was previously used as / t / in the Goalpara dialect. However, now the / th / in standard Assamese is pronounced as / th / in Goalpara.

St. As.,	Goalpara Dialect.	Goalpara (Present time).
kathã	kata	kathã
mãthã	mãtã	mãthã etc.

Many changes can be observed in the field of morphology as well.

1. "When we observe in the case of definiteness, the suffix 'tã/ te, khien' is prevalent everywhere.

ãkãx khien, ãkãxte
bai khien, bai te, bai tã
ghar khien, ghar tã, ghar te;
xarbat khani, xarbat khien, xarbat tã
ãnã khien

Specific suffixes like cāhal, phor, jallā, gutik, dām, konā have disappeared.

2. In the case of masculine pronouns, the usage of 'āpne' is currently widespread. Previously, terms like 'tumrā, umrā, ui,' etc., were used for the third person. However, due to the influence of the Bengali language, 'āpne' is now used in a more accepted sense. For example:

tumrā jāiben > āpne jāiben

3. The following frequently used possessive pronouns are no longer commonly used. They are listed below

achun, aichan, aichun (That's the way it is)
xemun, xemon (that's the way it is):
jhechun, jheichun (such as)
etotā, etotā (this much)
kechun, keichan (how, what kind of);
atatta (so much);
katatā (as much as) etc.

4. The use of adverbs like "takkari" (formerly), "xāinje" (in the evening), "ghapakai, ghupput" (suddenly), "hacchāt" (unexpectedly), "alpā" (slightly), etc., has gradually disappeared nowadays.

5. No one uses verb prefixes like gā, nāhin, dahan, etc. anymore. Instead, different words are used. such as:-

khā ga, khā jā (eat away);
khāba nāhin (do you eat)
kar gā > kār jā (going to do)
tui jāx dahan, tui jāx bole (see you go)

6. In the case of pleonastic, A good number of pleonastic, such as kālē, kun, ca, hād, hāden, te have disappeared altogether. As a result, only a limited number of pleonastic are in use. For example:

kālē : geile kālē (if he goes);
kun: ashis kun (you will come but)
ca: jai ca (let us speak);
te: kāin te (who then)
hād, hāden : jāi hād, jāi hāden (Let us go, let us)

The people of the Goalparia community speak a language at home that they do not use in formal educational settings. They speak one language at home and a different one outside. In educational institutions, religious events, meetings, and other formal settings, people in this region primarily use the standard language. Even when they travel to different regions, they tend to avoid using the language they speak at home and instead use the standard language along with English, Bengali, and Hindi. As a result, code-switching between Bengali, Hindi, and English is common in the conversations of the Goalparia dialect speakers. This practice of code-switching is widespread among both the educated and uneducated classes in this region.

Below are some examples illustrating this phenomenon:

1. tivir volume ta adjust kor
2. marketing koirte anek xamay lāgil
3. tui return jāwār jainne jaldi jaldi ghuri āy
4. ekdin journey kairle sharil tā tired hay.
5. kālām as a man mānux ta bhāl
6. flood er pāni jaldi xuki geche.
7. sabjit nun jyada hoise.

Electronic media has a significant impact on children's language. In today's busy life and nuclear families, children spend a lot of time watching cartoon shows or other programs in Hindi and English on TV. The dialogues of characters like Chhota Bheem, Doraemon, Nobita, Gian, Shuzuka, and Sinchen dominate children's minds, and many of the words spoken by these characters find their way into the children's vocabulary. As a result, many Hindi and English words are incorporated into their mother tongue. For example -

1. ārām se through mārim.
2. tui bodla nix.
3. khārāp kathā kowā bad habit.
4. daily daily chocolate khāy.
5. morningot jaldi jaldi uthā lāge.
6. tor boring lāikse nāki ?
7. mor energy down hoise.

Although there are so many appropriate words in the Goalparia dialect, speakers are always mindful of adding English phrases and sentence structures to their speech. Educated people are proficient at using phrases like "anyway" instead of "jāi houk," "excellent" instead of "chamatkar," and "good work" instead of "bhāl kām." As a result, terms like "good morning," "sorry," "time nai," "side den," "thank you," "so" etc., naturally find their way into the dialect.

Some educated individuals in this region feel embarrassed to speak in their mother tongue outside the home and therefore tend to ignore their dialect. Instead, they feel more comfortable speaking in standard languages or other regional languages in front of others. According to the information obtained from the field study for this research paper that about 30% of the vocabulary used by educated individuals in institutional settings in this region comes from foreign languages. Notably, 40% of the words used in conversations among the youth in this area are borrowed from other languages. It is worth mentioning that some educated and wealthy families use the standard language instead of their own dialect in daily conversation with their children.

A language's enrichment typically comes from the creation of literary works, books, and similar materials. To date, there have been no significant books or publications in the Goalparia dialect. As a result, how will the dialect gain prominence? Recently, some of the younger generation in this area have been posting and commenting in this dialect on social media, which is a positive sign. It can be said that the dialect is facing challenges due to a lack of folk literature preservation and promotion. Although Goalparia folk literature has historically been quite vibrant, it is at risk of fading away due to a lack of

preservation and promotion. The Goalparia community would benefit from taking steps forward in this area.

The term "Goalparia dialect" generally refers to the language spoken in the undivided Goalpara district. However, this "Goalparia language" is also prevalent in the North Bengal and the plain belt of West Garo Hills district of Meghalaya. The local people prefer to call this language 'Deshi Bhasha' or 'Deshi Katha'. Therefore, it seems that the name 'Goalparia dialect' was given by modern linguists. The indigenous Muslims of the undivided Goalpara district refer to themselves as 'Deshi,' and accordingly, they have received official recognition as the 'Deshi community.' Regardless of whether they were Hindu or Muslim, all the communities that spoke this language in the undivided Goalpara district referred to themselves as 'Deshi people.' Some renowned individuals have geographically recognized this spoken language of the undivided Goalpara district as the Goalparia dialect, but the local people still prefer to call it 'Deshi Bhasha' or 'Deshi Katha.' At present, this dialect has acquired several names—Deshi language, Goalparia, Rajbongshi, and Kamtapuri. This language is spoken by the Deshi Muslims, Rajbongshi, and almost all the people of Dhubri district, South Salmara-Mankachar districts, as well as the residents of 22 villages including Barua, Bamunburi, and Jamlai in Boko, and the people of the Lakhipur revenue circle in Goalpara district. This language is the commonly spoken language of these regions. It is natural for a single language and culture to be identified by different names. Due to the growing awareness about this issue, the name 'Goalparia dialect' or 'Goalparia culture' may not survive in the near future. It would be wise to adopt a universally accepted "name" to avoid this confusion.

CONCLUSION

The beauty of a language flourishes when creative literature, books, and similar works are produced in it. Unfortunately, the Goalparia dialect has yet to see the creation of any significant books or literature. As a result, how can the dialect thrive? Recently, some of the younger generation in this region have been observed posting and commenting in this dialect on social media, which is a positive sign. However, due to the lack of performance and preservation of folk literature, this dialect is facing a crisis. Although Goalpariya folk literature has been rich since ancient times, the absence of preservation and performance is causing it to gradually fade into obscurity. It would be beneficial if the Goalparia community took steps forward in this regard.

Language, like a flowing river, is ever-moving. But that does not mean it should be forced to flow uphill like a mountain stream. If we abandon the native vocabulary and rely on foreign or other languages' words, our language cannot flow naturally. Gradually, it becomes dependent on other languages. Language shift then becomes inevitable, and this is how one language perishes in the presence of a more dominant one.

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